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ABSTRACT

The study analyzes communicative interaction in an informal social setting, investigating how the social task of leave-taking organizes the interaction into a cohesive discourse. Data is taken from the last five minutes of a half-hour tape recording made during a Mexican-American family's Christmas gathering, when one group of guests prepares for leave-taking. The structure of this interaction is representable in four overlapping levels: initiation of leave-taking, leave-taking preparation, final joking interaction, and final leave-taking. The Mexican ethnicity of the group becomes evident in the themes which underlie the discourse and in the situational characteristics of the scene. The closeness and importance of the family, the male as the more important of the sexes, and the simultaneous interchanges and free emotional expressions are interactional norms for family social events in Hispanic communities. The investigation of ethnicity in the context of social, communicative interaction can contribute to providing empirical evidence for questions of Hispanic identity, culture, and ethnicity, important to the characterization of the group as a distinct, cultural entity in the United States. (NEC)

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Preparing to Leave:

Interaction at a Mexican-American Family Gathering¹

This study analyzes communicative interaction in an informal social setting, investigating how the social task of leave-taking organizes the interaction into a cohesive discourse. The data is taken from the last five minutes of a half-hour tape recording made during one Mexican-American family's Christmas gathering,² the relevant section involving the preparing for leave-taking of one group of guests, from which the discourse emerges. The discussion will be divided into two parts: the first part will orient the study to an ethnographic framework, the basis on which the component parts of the interaction will be considered; the second will examine the interaction more closely, analyzing the interactional structure of the discourse, its relationship to conversational closings, and its illustration of Mexican-American ethnicity.

1.0 Ethnographic Framework

Speech community. First the discourse must be situated within the social unit of its speakers, which Hymes (1972) calls the speech community. In this study, the speech community which is represented is that of Americans of Mexican descent living in the United States. Presently this is a very broad and diverse group; more specifically the family in this study belongs to that sub-group of second and third generation Mexican-Americans living in suburban communities in Southern California.

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Speech situation. The discourse is also situated within a speech situation, which provides a context for the verbal interaction but is not governed by its own set of rules for the use of speech. In this study, the speech situation is that of a party, the family's Christmas day gathering.

Speech event/Interactional segment. The speech event is the next unit of analysis, ". . . restricted to activities, or aspects of activities, that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech" (Hymes, 1972:56). A speech event may consist of one speech act or several, according to Hymes; however, it is not clear whether the discourse under consideration here comprises only one speech event. The activity involves not only many speech acts, but also many different kinds of speech acts which accomplish several kinds of 'social business.' In view of these complexities, we will refer to the entire discourse by the term, 'interactional segment,'³ as it circumscribes a segment of human interaction within a social frame, in this case, leave-taking activity. The component aspects of speech events as outlined by Hymes (1972:58-65) will also be relevant to the description of the interactional segment, and will be discussed later.

Speech acts. Functionally, a speech act is an utterance which accomplishes a type of verbal act by the very fact of its utterance, e.g., a promise, as in, "I promise to mow the lawn today." Its form can be that of an entire narrative or a one word utterance, and so is not identifiable as any one level of grammar. Here we will be concerned with the function of the speech acts in this discourse, looking to the specific context of the speech situation to understand the social norms for their use and interpretation.

1.1 Speech Event Components

Speech events are made up of various component parts, many of which are also applicable to the description of the interactional segment. Briefly, the components of speech events are: setting, participants, ends, act-sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms of interaction, and genre. (The first letter of each is easily remembered as contained in the word, 'speaking.')

Descriptive components. The descriptive components--setting, participants, and instrumentalities--situate the discourse in the physical world.

The discourse takes place in the dining room of a Mexican-American home, a modest tract house in a suburb of Los Angeles, California. The central location of the dining area where the tape recorder is set up--adjacent to the kitchen and not separate from the living room--makes it a good place for capturing much verbal interaction. The social scene is that of a family gathering on Christmas day--very informal, no 'best behavior' required. The event is characterized by lively, sometimes boisterous, multi-focussed interaction. The tape recorder which has been set up on the dining table has already been noticed and commented on by the guests in its immediate area, and then has been forgotten. Not all of the participants in the leave-taking segment are within range of the microphone previous to that activity, but the adults within range, predominantly women, converse about topics of general interest and family gossip; children can be heard to be

playing in the background. The room is very noisy, with the sound of children's piano playing in the next room, and the television in the living room.⁴

The participants are all related in the context of one three-generational nuclear family. The matriarch, age 69, is the first generation in the United States, having immigrated from Mexico before 1920. (She will be referred to as 'Mamá' or 'Mom' in the discussion.) The party is at the home of one of her daughters; the guests are also her daughters and sons-in-law, and their children--her grandchildren. The second generation, Mamá's daughters and their husbands, range in age from 34 to 51. Their children are third generation Mexican-Americans, ranging from pre-school age to age 23. The situational roles in the speech situation include hostess, co-hostess, host, and guests. These roles are relevant to the interaction but subordinate to the familial relationships, as an individual has only a temporary role in the speech situation but a permanent role in the speech community. The significance of these relationships to the interaction may be discussed further as relevant to the analysis of the data.

The relevant instrumentality here is speech. Paralinguistic features such as body language, facial expression, and the like are also relevant to the analysis of human interactions. However, because this data is taken from a tape recording, the analysis does not include any non-audible channel of communication. At some points in the interaction when simultaneous interchanges obscure the linguistic message, suprasegmental cues, e.g., pitch, intonation, etc., suggest how the message was intended, even though the actual content cannot be decoded.

The languages used are English and Spanish, with a much greater part of the discourse taking place in English than in Spanish. Mamá is usually addressed in Spanish and speaks it exclusively, although she understands almost all of the English spoken around her. Her daughters and sons-in-law usually speak Spanish to Mamá, and occasionally with each other, although they prefer English and almost always use it with their children. The children address everyone in English, except for an occasional word or phrase in Spanish.⁵

Interpretive components. The remaining components of this analysis relate more closely to the social frame of the interaction and call for the subjective interpretation of the analyst.

The genre of speech found in this discourse is that of lighthearted 'social talk,' and is very much tied to the type of social occasion that this is. The fact that all of the participants are closely related and are intimate observers of each others' lives allows for the topics to become very personal, but unselfconsciously so.

The key of the individual speech events '. . . provides for the tone, manner, or spirit in which an act is done' (Hymes, 1972:62). Finding one key is not easily done here, since the discourse in this study is comprised of many speech acts within speech events which occur over a six-minute time period. Rather, there are several keys in evidence, as the various moods and attitudes of the participants are not repressed as they might be in a non-familial context. This may be discussed with regard to individual interchanges later where relevant to the analysis.

'Act-sequence' is the term used to deal with the message form and message content of speech acts. It refers to the close inter-relationship between how an act is accomplished (e.g., singing, praying, etc.) and the meaning it conveys. Both form and content are central to the analysis of how a speech act communicates; however, what the speech acts accomplish will be of more interest than how they do what they do, so the act-sequence of speech acts will not be central to the analysis.

The norms of interaction for participants in the leave-taking segments are, in the main, those of the speech situation. In this Mexican-American family gathering, any participant may address any other at virtually any time, and may respond to anyone else's verbal contribution whether addressed or not. The familiarity of the participants and the looseness of the involvement structure⁶ for this social occasion allows for this high degree of conversational accessibility among the participants.⁷ Thus, the verbal interaction within this speech situation consists of many conversations, with a rapid turnover of topics and participants. Speakers may address each other in varying levels of volume depending on the speech act they wish to perform or the noise level of the room at the time of speaking. Other interactional norms are relevant only to the frame provided by the leave-taking activity. Later in the analysis, leave-taking emerges as structured interaction and suggests its own norms of appropriate behavior to be superimposed on those of the speech situation.

The norms of interpretation are shared by the participants in this speech situation because of their close familial relationship and frequent social interaction. This discourse exhibits no misunderstandings which could be the result of two groups of persons having different social interpretations of the constituent speech acts.

The goal of the guests in initiating the interaction is to take their leave of the occasion in a manner that is respectful of both the social relationships involved and the nature of the occasion itself. The logical ends of the interactional segment are served: those of the participants, since the departing guests succeed in leaving the family gathering in a socially acceptable manner, and those set up as the expectations of the leave taking, for the same reason.

2.0 Goals of Analysis

The primary goal of this discussion is to analyze the structure of the interactional segment in terms of the functions of the interchanges, or speech acts, which make up the discourse. To do so, the author of the present study draws upon personal knowledge of the people and the speech situation, offering her unique perspective as a member of the family group and a natural participant in the interaction. Secondary goals will be to relate aspects of the leave-taking segment to closing sections of conversations, as discussed by Sacks and Schegloff (1973), and to illustrate how the discourse manifests the ethnicity of this group. The latter will be discussed after the analysis of the data.

2.1 Analysis of Discourse Structure

The discourse begins when one of the participants informs one of her group that they will be leaving. This announcement opens the way for a single focus of attention in the speech situation; the participants, whose main activity up to this point has been social conversation on a variety of topics, now direct their attention to the activity of the departing guests. The interaction itself is still multi-focussed⁸ in that two or more people may begin their own conversations. However, often the conversation relates to or contributes to the leave-taking rituals which are now the focus of the speech situation.

The nature of the interactional segment called 'leave-taking' is a series of interchanges which the participants engage in to conduct 'social business'--everything from negotiating the decision to leave to the offering of assistance in leave-taking preparations. These interchanges are comprised of speech acts classifiable as 'levels' within the interaction. This term emphasizes their function in the overall activity, several levels providing the paradigmatic structure of the entire interactional segment. The syntagmatic aspect of the speech acts in the discourse is undeniably important, as well; however, the sequential appropriateness of certain types of speech acts near the beginning, middle, or at the end can be accounted for in terms of the function they serve in the activity. In leave-taking, the sequential ordering of classes of speech acts may be seen as a corollary operation of their functional classification, although

their division into stages is not so neat in this real data. Thus, 'level' is more important to this analysis as a functional classification rather than a sequential one.

Level 1: Initiation of leave-taking.

It is early evening (5 or 6 o'clock) on Christmas Day when the leave-taking is initiated. The group about to take their leave is comprised of Helen, her husband, Manuel, and their immediate family, Valerie and Annette.⁹ They have brought Helen's mother, the matriarch of the family group, to the Christmas gathering, and so are responsible for taking her home. She is also the mother of Connie, Concha, and Lucy, all married with children of their own. The party is at Lucy's house, making her the hostess, her husband, John, the host, and daughter Maryellen, the co-hostess.

This is one of a well-established tradition of family gatherings held on the occasion of religious or secular holidays, or rite-of-passage celebrations such as birthdays, baptisms, etc. Normally, guests stay until mid-evening, occasionally until late evening. Helen's family group will be the first to leave, signalling the beginning of the termination of the yearly Christmas celebration. Moreover, her leaving will mean the departure of Mamá, whose presence is one of the requisite components of the occasion.

The leave-taking segment is initiated by Helen's informing her mother that they will be leaving shortly. She accomplishes this by saying in a low conversational tone, (1) "¿Ya nos vamos a ir, Mom?" (000),¹⁰ roughly equivalent to saying, "We're going now, Mom. Okay?"

This statement has the effect of announcing her plan of leaving to the group in general, although she directs it only to one of the persons who will be leaving with her. Due to the high degree of conversational accessibility in the speech situation, the rest of the group is free to respond to it as well, which they quickly do.

It is evident that Helen creates a state of tension by her announcement. The other participants in the interaction, her sisters, try to induce her to stay. In the following examples, both familial roles and situational roles are pertinent to the interpretation and effectiveness of the objections of the participants. (Extraneous comments are not represented in these examples, although they may intervene; this exchange occurs within a very short span of time. Addressees are indicated except where obvious.)

(2) Helen: (To her mother) ¿Ya nos vamos a ir, Mom? (000) (We're going now, Mom. Okay?)

TELEPHONE RINGS LOUDLY (001)

Connie: (To Helen) ¿Ya se van tan pronto? (002) (You're going so soon?)

Concha: (To general audience) Gee, just when the party was getting good. (002.5)

Connie: (To Helen) Really? ¿De Veras? ¿Se Van? (003)
(Really? Truly? You're going?)

Concha: (To general audience) Just when the party was getting charming. (004.5)

Concha: Just when I was// (005.5)

Helen: (To Valerie) Valerie, we're going. (006)

Concha: Just when I was losing my depression. (007)

Here, Connie expresses genuine surprise and disappointment at the announcement, since the hour is so early. Concha, however, objects because she evaluates the party as "getting good" and "getting charming," and is reluctant to have anyone leave, thereby signalling the end of the social occasion. The end of the party will mean the end of her good time as a guest, a situational role in which she has been forgetting about her depression.

(3) Concha: (To general audience) Just when I was getting ov// (011)

MOMENTARY DIN

Concha: Just when I was getting over my conflicting emotions! (012)

Helen: Well, it doesn't take very, you very . . ., very much to get over your conflicting emotions! (013-4)

Helen dismisses her objection, indicating that Concha couldn't have been so upset if a family gathering could alleviate her problems.

Concha's repetition of the theme of her depression functions to elicit a response. A supportive response from one of her sisters would indicate that her problems were serious cause for familial concern, but Concha's semi-joking key and persistence in recycling bids for attention undermine the serious content of her objections, and contribute to her receiving a non-supportive response. When Helen alludes to the social occasion in minimizing her sister's alleged inner turmoil, she also minimizes the social occasion which, in turn, serves to diminish the importance of her decision to leave.

Whereas Concha's joking tone and series of apparent bids for attention belie her words, the sincerity of Connie's objections are evidenced in the rise in pitch of her voice and her persistent reiterations of them, both to Helen and to Mamá.

(4) Connie: (To Helen) How come you're going so early? (014)

Concha: (To Mom) Do you have to go, Mamá? (015)

Connie: (To Helen) Do you have to go? (016)

Helen: Huh? (016.5)

Connie: Do you have to go? (017)

Helen: Yes, (()) (017.5) 'Cause we don't live in Pico Rivera, we live over there. (018) (Imitates Connie's distressed high-pitched tone and intonation.)

Helen: (To Connie) We stayed up real late, and we went// (021)

Connie: Probably not, not later than we did. (022)

In this example, Helen's mocking tone shows that she is aware of her sister's distress, and is amused by it, but her decision stands firm. She tries to excuse herself by offering the fact of having stayed up late, but she is only countered by Connie's saying that she did, too. A brief interchange ensues, where Connie explains the circumstances of her late Christmas Eve. Thus, the objection is deflected without Helen's having to argue for it as a valid reason for leaving.

We can infer from the strength of Connie's objection that the hour is unusually early for anyone to leave the family party. In doing so, Helen is violating a situational rule regarding the appropriate

hour for leaving, which, in turn, is apparently over ruled by the looseness of the involvement structure for this type of family party. It is this looseness which allows her to leave when she wants. As we can see, Connie's strong objections are the price that must be paid for breaking the rule and standing by the decision to leave.

Meanwhile, Lucy has reacted in her role as hostess by offering what to her seem attractive inducements to stay.

- (5) Lucy: (To Helen) You don't, you don't want to . . . you don't want to stay and listen to// (009)

OTHER INTERACTION

- Lucy: (To Helen) You don't want to stay and listen to Tom Jones? I mean, to hear . . . to see Tom Jones in color? (010)

NON-RELATED INTERACTION

- Lucy: (To Helen) I have a Tom Jones record from Maryellen for ((Christmas)). (015)

Helen, however, ignores this, for she is busy attending to Connie's objections. The fact that Lucy makes her offers in a conversational tone, in contrast to Connie's high-pitched insistences, could be a reason for non-attention.¹¹

Helen has opened the leave-taking segment by operationalizing a decision to leave, presumably made jointly with her husband earlier. Immediately following the announcement of their plan, there has occurred a period of feedback wherein other guests in the situation have voiced their objections. Helen's indirect announcement of her decision to leave as a fait accompli shows that she does not feel that she needs to negotiate with the other guests as to whether her

own family's participation in the social occasion will end or not. But in view of the fact that her announcement is met with much resistance, this period of feedback is crucial as a test of her determination to leave, and so serves as a period of negotiation among the participants in which they determine the subsequent nature of the occasion.¹²

At the end of the interchanges between Helen and her sisters, the tension created by the initial announcement is resolved, and some social business has been accomplished. It has been established as a plan of action that Helen and her encourage will leave; this has divided the social occasion into two groups, one which will be leaving and one which will be staying. The fact that the character of the party is being altered subsequently affects the verbal interaction of the group at large.

Level 2: Leave-taking preparation

In another type of interchange, participants attend to the physical and social concerns occasioned by the imminent leave-taking. For the departing guests, this means notifying their own family group, gathering up belongings and storing them in the car, and so on. Helen's first utterance in the leave-taking segment, "¿Ya nos vamos a ir, Mom?", is the first step in operationalizing the decision to leave. It can properly be classified in two levels of the interaction. Soon afterwards, she informs another family member of the decision, with: (6) Valerie, we're going now (006). (See example (2) for context.) It is interesting that Helen's announcement to Valerie has the same informational content as her initial utterance to her mother, yet does not have

the same impact on the group because of its non-initial slot in the flow of interaction. While both utterances are propositionally the same, the first has two perlocutionary effects while the second has only one.

Mamá is the first to begin gathering things together by directly soliciting help from the hostess as she asks for: (7) ". . . un paquetito para poner esto" (024) 'A little bag to put this in.' Her request is made early on, while the decision to leave is being negotiated by Helen and her sisters. By beginning her preparations, she--as the family figurehead--indicates her acceptance of the decision, although she wields no real authority over it because of her acquiescent nature and her dependence on her daughter for a ride home.

Later, when Manuel starts to ask about his things, it is an indication that the decision to leave is irreversible. Respect for and compliance with his wishes are due to his status as a male and therefore the acknowledged head of his household. His physical preparations include finding lost objects and gathering things together. An important social duty to be performed first is to say goodbye to the host, his brother-in-law, John.

(8) Manuel: (To general audience) I don't know where John is. (051)

Manuel: (To unknown addressee) Huh? So I can go. (052)

Connie: (Over the din, to Lucy) ¿Onde// está Juan? (053)

(Where is John?)

(9) Manuel: (In response to an undistinguishable question.)

Wherever you hide clothes. (053)

Maryellen: (To Manuel) What are you looking for? (053.5)

Manuel: (To Maryellen) My// (()) (Inaudible due to overlap)
(054)

Helen: (To Maryellen, almost simultaneously) (()) jacket. (054)

Maryellen: Oh--(sustained falling intonation) I understand. (055)

(10) Manuel: (In response to an undistinguishable question) Yes
it is. (To unknown addressee) Where are you hiding my
son? (059)

Connie: (To Manuel) Your family are. . . They're all in there.
(059.4)// Val's in there with them. (060) Where is
Val? (061)

Manuel: (To unknown addressee) (()) hiding my son? (060)

(11) Maryellen: (To Manuel) Your hunting jacket. (061.5) (While
offering it; an announcement that it has been found.)

First Manuel, then Helen engages the help of the group in general, establishing a period of transition from the guests' passive acceptance of the group's leave-taking and their active participation in it. Whereas previously the participants, Connie in particular, had objected strongly to their leaving, now they are allied in a cooperative effort to expedite it. They have apparently given up their objections about breaking up the party, which they had raised in their roles as guests, and are now acting as concerned family relations helping each other out. The speech community, exemplified by the long-standing relationships within the family, resumes its primacy, and the apparent break between the two groups within the speech situation is repaired.

These interchanges show that it is the force of speech acts such as Manuel's which is responded to in situations like this, rather than the presuppositions which the utterances convey. This is due to the key of the interaction, which Manuel intends as good-natured joking. He makes a statement about "clothes," with the jocular presupposition that someone has hidden them. Maryellen determines that "clothes" refers to his jacket, and soon presents it to him. Manuel demands to know where someone had "hidden" his son in an utterance with the illocutionary force of a question with a presupposed accusation which is intended humorously. Connie responds with helpful information, ignoring the accusation and responding to the real force of the utterance. He is effective in eliciting help and facilitating the progress towards his leave-taking by making his indirect pleas for help in a manner appropriate to the light-hearted spirit of the social occasion.

Helen, having been the one to initiate her family's leave-taking with a great deal of resistance from her sisters, feels free to call on them in helping her collect her things for departure. The initial tension has been fleeting, because her assertiveness in leaving is her prerogative as their eldest sister, and because this family's norm of interpretation for such disagreements is that they are minor and not disruptive of family harmony. In two separate tries, Helen solicits help from her sisters, but members of her immediate family are better able to supply the information.

(12) Helen: (To unknown addressee) Oh, oh. Oh, really. (057) (To general group) Where, where is my . . . where are my . . . ah . . . my gifts? (054)

(13) Annette: (To her mother, Helen) Where did you put it? (063.5)

Helen: Ask Daddy. I told Daddy to, to keep (()). (064)

(14) Helen: (Probably to hostess, Lucy) Where's our box of gifts?

I told you I'd take those. (068) (In a joking tone.)

Valerie: (To Helen) I put them in the car. (070)

Helen: Oh. (071)

Manuel: (To Valerie) Did you put them in the car? (069)

Helen: Huh? (069.5)

Valerie: (To Helen) I put them in the car. (070)

Helen: Oh. (071)¹³

This last example is important because it underscores the integrity of the immediate family group within the social unit of the extended family. This integrity is demonstrated by the personal obligations assumed by the family members as well as by the discourse obligations assumed by them. Evidently, responsibility for the gifts has been taken by another of Helen's immediate family. The discourse shows that the topic of 'gifts' is one that only the immediate family has information on, Manuel re-addressing a more specific question about the gifts to a member of his and Helen's immediate family group. It is that person who takes responsibility in the discourse for answering Helen's question, doing so because of Manuel's question to her and, interestingly, providing a syntactically appropriate answer to both questions.

Leave-taking preparations, as shown in examples (7)-(14) foreshadow the actual leave-taking of the guests in much the same way that pre-closings¹⁴ in telephone conversations foreshadow the end of the conversation. Within the context of the family party, pre-closings are accomplished by

the activity of leave-taking preparations and by the speech acts associated with them.

Sacks and Schegloff (p. 301) find that the main function of foreshadowing is to leave the option open for inserting new items into the conversation, which they call 'mentionables,' items which could not have been fitted naturally into the conversation at a previous point in the discourse. The leave-taking preparations of the departing guests signal a similar opportunity to bring up 'mentionables' addressed to people who are leaving the party, which take the form of speech acts which were not performed previously during the social occasion.

One guest thanks her mother for bringing the sweater that she had forgotten.

(17) Concha: (To her mother) Thank you for finding my sweater,
mon. (026)

Mamá: (To Concha) O, sí. Cómo no . . . Pos, no . . . Esta
memoria de esta muchacha no me ayuda. (027) (Oh, yes.
Certainly. Well, it doesn't . . . This girl's memory
doesn't help me.)

We see that Concha also takes advantage of leave-taking preparation time to attempt to elicit another verbal 'stroke,' this time from the departing Valerie, as to the acceptability of her Christmas gift.

(16) Concha: (To Valerie) Do you like your record box, Val? (034)

Valerie: (To Concha) Sure. (034.5) (In a non-committal tone)

Concha: Well, you better. (035)

Once again, she does not succeed in getting the stroke, perhaps because it is an obvious solicitation of praise.

While this exchange occurs in the middle of the leave-taking segment, Concha calls attention to another gift very near the end, after the first 'goodbye' is said. This interchange seems out of place in the discourse, seeming to create a structural flaw in the interaction. It requests an activity which might take longer to comply with than the time available. Only a few seconds after this, the adults in the group finish their leave-taking and move toward the door.

- (17) Concha: (To Annette) Show Auntie Connie the, the, show Auntie Connie the towel I got you. (097.5) (To Connie) Did you see the towel// I got her? (098)

Manuel: Towel? (098.5)

Connie: No, I didn't see the towel. (099)

Sacks and Schegloff point out that when new items are inserted into the closing section of a conversation, especially activities usually performed in another section of the conversation, they are usually 'marked' as having been misplaced. This is accomplished linguistically by a word or phrase, or by intonation, which indicates that its user is oriented to the proper sequential organizational character of the conversation (p. 320). Although she does not mark it as such, Concha's final bid for a supportive exchange seems to be 'misplaced,' as it does not pertain to the imminent leave-taking of the guests, and yet occurs immediately before it. The speaker is either not aware of violating a norm of interaction in terms of the sequential progression of the leave-taking, or, because of the norm of looseness in the situation founded in the close familiarity of the participants, she feels free to suspend the displacement marker that might properly

accompany such a request, e.g., "I know you're leaving, but could you show . . .?"¹⁵

Near the end of the segment, Lucy, the hostess, and Maryellen, her daughter and co-hostess, both work in concert in their situational and familial roles to assure the smooth departure of their guests. As illustrated in the following example, they are oriented to the holiday that is the occasion of the family gathering as they continue the gift-giving ritual characteristic of the day.

(18) Lucy: (To Maryellen) María Elena. (087) Do you have anything that's, uh, anything that's here for my mom? (088)

Maryellen: (To Manuel) Will you see Anna Marie before long? (091)

Lucy's speech act is taken as a request for action, and so the slot for a response to her question is filled by the activity of looking through the pile of undistributed gifts. The question to Manuel is relevant to that activity because Maryellen finds one gift there for his grand-daughter, Anna Marie, which might be given over to him for delivery. In directing the question to Manuel, Maryellen has assumed Lucy's responsibility for the proper distribution of belongings to the guests, appropriate not only to their roles in the social situation, but daughter being supportive of mother because of their interpersonal relationship.

Within this level of the interactional segment there appear to be two sub-classes of speech acts: one which foreshadows the leaving by dealing with the concerns of the departing guests, and another which introduces 'mentionables,' much as Sacks and Schegloff have found in the closing sections of conversations. The departing group--Helen, Manuel, Mamá, Valerie, and Annette--operationalize the

decision to leave by gathering belongings, finding people, and looking for things with the help of their relatives. Other participants orient to the foreshadowing by taking advantage of the period to introduce 'mentionables' reflective of the season, e.g., soliciting praise for gifts, as well as the family setting, e.g., thanks for a sweater that was forgotten on a previous visit.

Level 3: Final joking interchanges

In this level of the interactional segment, the tone becomes very lighthearted as allusions are made to 'next time.' These interchanges are final opportunities to engage in the type of interaction that characterizes this type of gathering--good-natured joking and teasing.

(19) Helen: (To Maryellen and Concha) Aren't you, aren't you invited to Billy's and Christie's young adults? (043) (())
young adults? (044)

Maryellen: They didn't tell us about it. I don't think we're invited. (045)

Helen: You, you were talking about . . . about how// (045.5)

Concha: No, just didn't make it. (046)

Helen: . . . about how you guys (()) young adults. (048)

This topic then leads to much joking about the appropriateness of the term, 'young adult,' for one of the participants.

Another exchange, clearly initiated in a jocular tone, turns attention to the certainty of another family party such as the one that is ending. That this type of gathering is customary for this family group is reflected in the presupposition in the example below.

(20) Manuel: (To general audience) Alright. Where's the next party gonna be? (077)

Concha: Down at your house. (078)

Manuel: Again? (078.5)

LAUGHTER (079)

Helen: See what you get? (079)

This exchange opens the floor to much joking about the would-be party. One guest says, "Expect us." Another interjects, "Well, we don't smoke or drink," and the interaction continues in a similar vein for a short period.

The topics introduced in these examples, which refer to future parties, seem to have very little to do with leave-taking at first glance. If they are new topics in the interaction, they may be related to what Sacks and Schegloff report for conversations, ". . . topics may be improvised for insertion into a closing sequence to extend the time available for such pre-leave-taking preparations, as when visitors gather their belongings before departure" (p. 323). In our data, Helen seems to be using the time afforded by the rest of her group's leave-taking preparations to introduce the topic of another party, although she does not do so in order to lengthen the time for them. But it is not properly a new topic, since she relates it to a previous conversation when she says, "You, you were talking about. . . ." This could be related to what Sacks and Schegloff call 'topic shading,' ". . . the fitting of differently focused but related talk to some last utterance in a topic's development" (p. 305). By relating this topic to one discussed before the initiation of leave-taking, Helen recalls the previous nature of the party, creating an overlap between two ideally sequential stages of the social gathering. So, example (19) seems to perform the function of shading one level of

interaction, i.e., 'party conversation,' into another, i.e., leave-taking, much as topic shading provides a transition between topics in a conversation.

Leave-taking preparations having been completed, Manuel introduces the final topic for group interaction by saying, "Alright. Where's the next party gonna be? Thus, he reaffirms the unity of the whole family group by looking forward to the next family gathering, although it is his group's early departure that has perhaps precipitated the end of the present gathering. The general joking conversation which follows is the last focussed interaction in which the whole group takes part.

Manuel's introduction of the 'next party' as a final topic serves as a 'signature,' calling to mind the type of social occasion that is ending. Sacks and Schegloff use the term, 'signature,' to refer to one possible component part of the closing section of a conversation which displays a recognition of the type of conversation that is terminating. Goffman's description of what a 'goodbye' does also seems to describe the function of the 'next party' topic in example (20): ". . . the goodbye brings the encounter for the relationship, and bolsters the relationship for the anticipated period of no contact" (1972:79). Its sequential placement shortly before the goodbye ritual makes it perhaps interactionally more a part of the final leave-taking than merely a final opportunity for socializing within the interactional frame.

Level 4: Final leave-taking

The final leave-taking is accomplished by a final terminal exchange, that is, a goodbye ritual which serves to cut off new topics of interaction with the departing guests. During the joking about the next party, Helen offers her first 'goodbye' to the hostess, saying simply, "Bye, Lucy." Although this is ignored at the time,

possibly due to general participation in the joking, it is significant that it is Helen, the initiator of the leave-taking, who is the one to attempt the first terminal exchange. Her singleness of purpose leads her to disregard her husband's need to find the host to say goodbye to, a situational obligation which must be accomplished before they can leave in a socially appropriate manner.

In Manuel's initial attempt to locate John, Connie came to his aid, asking the hostess where he was. The next time Manuel asks about John, it is done quickly and quizzically, and Connie once again offers help. Helen's final leave-taking prompts Manuel to raise the volume of his voice and to express exasperation in his intonation upon making his final direct request to learn John's whereabouts:

(21) Manuel: (To general audience) Where's John? (100)

Connie: ((I saw him)) Outside a while ago.

SEVERAL SECONDS ELAPSE

Helen: Well, we're gonna go, Lucy. Thanks for ev//erything. (102)

Manuel: Where is John? (102)

Obviously he, unlike his wife, feels that he cannot properly leave the family gathering unless he takes leave of the host as well as the hostess.¹⁶

Unfortunately, we never do find out where John is or whether Manuel finds him before he goes, because Manuel's exasperated voice is the last one we hear on the tape before it ends. Nevertheless, the social interaction can be seen to have come to a logical end with the proffering of a final leave-taking ritual from Helen. Manuel has shown proper and serious concern for his social obligations by expressing his frustration at not finding the host to take leave of; thus, he can be said to have completed his obligation in spirit.

The terminal exchange properly signals the end of the departing guests' involvement in the social event, and the end of the leave-taking segment. However, in this data, the terminal exchange is not accomplished by an adjacency pair as it is strictly defined. Rather, what we see here is a terminal exchange ritual which is recycled by one departing guest to ensure the attention of the hostess. The host's physical absence from the scene would necessitate a goodbye to be conveyed by proxy; however, such a leave-taking cannot be as satisfactory as a face-to-face ritual which would bolster the relationship for the time during which they will not see each other. All other guests present may informally take leave of the departing guests after the host and/or hostess do. Unlike the terminal exchange in a two-party conversation, which ends the speech event, the final leave-taking of some of the guests does not necessarily end the social occasion if there are other groups of guests still present.

2.2 Summary of Analysis

In the analysis of the data, we have considered Helen's utterance, "¿Ya Nos vamos a ir, Mom? (We're going now, Mom. Okay?), to have initiated the interactional segment of leave-taking. We have seen that the structure of this interaction is representable in four levels, ideally sequential, but in fact overlapping.

- Level 1: Initiation of leave-taking
- Level 2: Leave-taking preparations
- Level 3: Final joking interaction
- Level 4: Final leave-taking

Throughout the five-minute segment during which leave-taking activity is the prime focus of attention, no one conversation has been sustained. However, here we have shown that many interchanges involving different participants achieve an overall coherence in light of their focus on the leave-taking activity. It is this coherence which allows for our interpretation of this interaction as a discourse.

3.0 Ethnicity

This has been a micro-study of a segment of human social interaction which was situated in a Mexican-American home and is reflective of the social and linguistic behaviors of one Mexican-American family in the greater Los Angeles area. In some respects, the interaction examined here is reflective of human interaction in general, in some others, it is reflective of a broader American culture context, and in yet others it is uniquely Mexican-American. We will here discuss how Mexican ethnicity in some of the components of this interactional segment contributes to the nature of this particular interaction, and at the end of the discussion, present suggested areas of future research.

The Mexican ethnicity of the group becomes evident in the themes which underlie the discourse and in the situational characteristics of the scene. The closeness and importance of the family is a cultural theme of many ethnic groups, and in this situation underlies much of the interaction: for example, 'amá's leaving changes the status of the party; the family helps the departing guests to find **their** things, the next family party is mentioned, and so on. The male

as the more important of the sexes is another theme which is manifested, as it is the only male in the interaction who provides authority for the decision to leave and rallies everyone to his aid.

One of the cultural characteristics of the interaction is the great commotion in the background, obscuring the discourse at several points. This is not a quiet leave-taking--everyone is conversationally accessible to everyone else, there is much overlapping in interchanges, and voices often rise in pitch and volume, all of which indicate that noise, verbal overlapping, simultaneous interchanges and free emotional expression are interactional norms for family social events in Hispanic communities.

The use of Spanish and English, with evidence of certain non-standard features in each, mark the interaction as Mexican-American. For example, Connie switches from English to Spanish in: Really? ¿De Veras? ¿Se Van?, and when she asks about the host, she says, "¿Ónde está Juan?" using the nonstandard, 'Ónde' (where), but more significantly, asking in Spanish rather than English. Although the group is English-dominant, save for Mamá, there is some phonological interference in some of the English in the data, e.g., Connie: "Do you have to go?" [du yu hef tu gow?]. There is also an occasional lexical inappropriateness, e.g., Concha: "Just when I was losing my depression." ("Getting over" might have been more appropriate.) There is even a pragmatically odd-sounding offer, e.g., Lucy: "You don't want to stay and listen to Tom Jones?" Another phenomenon is the changeover within the family from Spanish names to English names. Thus, Elena is Helen, Consuelo is Connie, and so on. Even Manuel is called /Mányel/ instead of /Manwél/. Spanish names are used to evoke the

intimacy of family ties, as illustrated when Lucy (Luz) directly addresses her daughter as "María Elena" in example (18) whereas in example (5) she had been referred to as "Maryellen."

Unfortunately, the scope of this paper permits only brief mention of the ethnicity of the interaction; these are only a few of the themes and characteristics which are manifested in it. We hope to have shown that this group's membership in a Mexican-American speech community is very much a part of the character of the discourse.

It would be fruitful for future research in this area to investigate in greater depth the ethnic aspects of conversational interaction. The particular interaction investigated here was representative of an English-dominant, second generation, acculturating working class group, in the context of a social situation which is common to both the Mexican-American and American-mainstream cultures. If the data had been collected at a party in Mexico, there undoubtedly would have been differences in the character of the components of the interaction aside from the likely use of Spanish as the primary language. In Mexico, different social norms would have been operative, altering the nature of the speech situation and the rules for the communicative interaction. It would be speculative to suggest here exactly how they would be different; this type of comparative study with a Mexican family of the same class in Mexico would be one avenue for further research. Or, future research could focus on other Hispanic speech communities in the United States, changing, for example, the variables of locale, length of time of the group in the United States, language dominance of the participants, social class of the family, degree of

contact with a non-Spanish speaking greater community, in an effort to characterize what is common in communicative interaction across groups of Mexicans and other Hispanics, and what is particular to specific Hispanic speech communities in different locales. This type of work, the investigation of ethnicity in the context of social, communicative interaction, can contribute to providing empirical evidence for questions of Hispanic identity, culture, and ethnicity, important to the characterization of the group as a distinct, cultural entity in the United States.

4.0 Conclusion

In this paper we have used data from the leave-taking activity of one group of guests at a Mexican-American family gathering to analyze the structure of the discourse and its social functions. We have looked at the data in terms of the ethnography of communication, utilizing the term, 'interactional segment,' not included as one of Hymes' levels of speech, to designate an activity analyzable in the social frame of 'leave-taking.' We have analyzed the interaction which makes up the discourse, and have shown that it is comprised of four levels, which constitute the structure of the interactional segment. We have also compared some aspects of the leave-taking sequence with the characteristics of the closing sections of conversations, and have found some similarities, such as a period for introducing 'mentionables,' the occurrence of structurally 'misplaced' material, interactional shading related to conversational topic shading, and a verbal signature which recalls the type of event that is ending.

Finally, we have indicated how the cultural heritage of the Mexican-American interactants provides, in part, for the character of the discourse. Future studies would profit from investigating how social interaction organizes discourse, and from considering the interaction from the perspective of group ethnicity.

Footnotes

¹ I take this opportunity to give heartfelt thanks to Marilyn Merritt and Bruce Osborne for their invaluable guidance and encouragement. Both saw me through rough drafts of this paper. Many insights and interpretations of the data would not have been possible without their help.

² I tape recorded my own family's Christmas celebration in 1970. Then a graduate student in Hispanic linguistics, my only goal was to get unmonitored speech; I was not sure how the resulting recording would be used. I was a natural participant in the interaction, and was not aware of my cassette recorder at the time of this interaction.

³ The term, 'segment,' was suggested to me by Marilyn Merritt to describe this type of interactional unit. It was suggested to her by Erving Goffman for use in her own work.

⁴ Although much of the noise has died down by the time the leave-taking sequence occurs, interaction that one would like to attend to on the tape is often lost because of the multi-layering of speech in the situation. Only my status as a participant and member of this family group allowed me to pick out relevant utterances after repeated listenings. For these reasons and reasons of length, no transcript of the entire five-minute interaction is presented here.

⁵ The informal family setting, the participants' in-group status (members of one closely-knit family, sharing the same social and linguistic background), would all seem to make extended use of Spanish or code-switching appropriate, yet the preferred language here is English; no code-switching style is in evidence.

⁶'Looseness' and 'tightness' are terms which Goffman prefers to 'informal' and 'formal' in describing social gatherings. He explains his terms as a way of talking about the involvement structure of a social occasion: ". . . there may be one overall continuum or axis along which the social life in situations varies, depending on how disciplined the individual is obliged to be . . ." (with regard to the appropriate behavior for the social situation). For a more complete discussion, see Goffman, 1966, p. 199.

⁷Marilyn Merritt suggested to me that easy conversational accessibility accounted for much of the verbal interaction in my data. She discusses the related notion of transactional accessibility in her dissertation (Merritt, 1976).

⁸'Focussed interaction' is a term which Goffman proposes which deals with ". . . the kind of interaction that occurs when persons gather close together and openly cooperate to sustain a single focus of attention, typically by taking turns at talking" (1966:24). This suggests that a conversation is a single-focussed event. A party may have many such ongoing conversations, and would constitute what Goffman calls a multifocussed gathering (1966:91). In this paper I adopt Goffman's distinctions, but I also use 'focus' in its common meaning in saying that the leave-taking activity provides a common focus for the participants involved.

⁹Those named in the text either participate in or are referred to in the interaction as reported by means of the examples. They are not the only people present at the family gathering.

¹⁰The numbers after the examples refer to counter numbers on the Hitachi Auto Stop Cassette Recorder TRQ-341. Each count of 10 represents 35 seconds of tape, each digit, approximately 3.5 seconds. For subsequent examples, double parentheses (()) indicate undecipherable speech; the same double parentheses enclosing a word indicates what was probably said. The double slash // indicates that the utterance is overlapped at that point by the subsequent utterance or noise, as indicated on the typescript. ALL CAPS indicate an audible activity on the tape relevant to the interaction.

¹¹Much later in the interaction, Maryellen apparently offers another inducement to stay by saying to Helen: "You're gonna miss the pie" (073). However, this is delivered in a resigned tone and a broadly joking foreign accent, and Helen replies jokingly in kind, "No, thanks. I've got to go on a diet," effectively deflecting the offer as a serious reason for her to stay.

¹²A means of negotiation is also found in the closing sections of telephone conversations, where the two parties need to determine the subsequent nature of the speech event, i.e., whether it will terminate or not. See Sacks and Schegloff, 1973, pp. 295-298 for their discussion of how an adjacency pair suspends transitional relevance (esp. p. 298).

¹³The interchange among the immediate family members continues with the following:

- Manuel: (To Valerie) ((You didn't tell me.)) Did you? (i.e.,
Did you put them in the car?) (072)
Valerie: ((Yeah)) (072.5)
Manuel: Oh. (073)

It is clear from the tape that Valerie has addressed her answer in (14) to Helen and that it resolves Helen's question about the whereabouts of the gifts. The tape also registers the peripherally related and overlapping verbal interaction and extraneous background noise of the situation, so it is understandable that Manuel might not have heard Valerie's response to his question. (Although it was directed at Helen, it would have been conversationally accessible to Manuel had the room not been so noisy.) As indicated by the double parentheses above, parts of this last exchange between Manuel and Valerie are not clearly audible on the tape, but those clearly audible portions, along with the suprasegmentals of the partially obscured portions, invite this reconstruction.

¹⁴Sacks and Schegloff suggest a category of utterances as possible pre-closings, things such as, "Well . . . ," "Okay . . . ," "So-oo . . . ," etc. (with downward intonation contours) as the entire utterance.

In a two-party conversation, a pre-closing takes a speaker's turn without speaking to the topic or indicating a new one, giving a free turn to the other person, who can introduce a new topic (pp. 303-5).

¹⁵The lack of such a 'marker' may also be due to the fact that an adult is addressing a much younger niece, who is out-ranked in terms of age and kinship status and is therefore not normally given such linguistic deference.

¹⁶This obligation may be more strongly felt by Manuel than his wife because traditionally the men interact more with each other than with the women at these occasions. The fact that the men's membership in the family is due to marriage rather than blood and upbringing contributes to their self-exclusion from the activity of sisterly gossip during the gathering.

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